

BABEȘ-BOLYAI UNIVERSITY
FACULTY OF GEOGRAPHY
Doctoral School of Geography

**MULTI-LEVEL TERRITORIAL GOVERNANCE AND REGIONALIZATION IN
ROMANIA**

summary

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‘European integration and the emergence of regions. Together these are restructuring European space and challenging the idea of nation-state as the framework for representation, policy making and identity. This is the Europe into which the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are joining!’

Michael Keating (2003: 9)

‘In the following period Romania has to overcome the economic gap it faces towards Europe, by bringing public services and decisions closer to the ordinary citizen – according to the European principle of subsidiarity – and by using existing resources in a more efficient way: local resources, governmental funds and European possibilities.’

Government of Romania – Statement of the Ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration (2013)

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Introduction

Since the emergence of the very first Romanian nation state, the debate whether the country should be organized on a centralized or a regionalized basis frequently dominated the political agenda. Contrary to many countries where regions are mainly units for statistical data gathering, in Romania due to the fragmentation of the geographical space, diverse paths of development – of the constituting units of the state – and a unique mix of culturo-historical heritage regions do indeed exist. What’s more as will be presented in this thesis there is significant momentum behind regional identities in Romania. In this respect it doesn’t come as surprise that whenever surfaced the necessity to reorganize the current administrative system the idea to do it along the historical regions always appeared. In fact in the last 100 years the Romanian state was always balancing back and forth between centralism and regionalism, centralism frequently prevailing due to fear that a regionalized approach could ignite the emergence of centrifugal forces and lead ultimately to the disintegration of the state. Considering the hardly achieved unity and independence, the centralist, Napoleonic tradition was viewed as the guarantee of the stability of the state.

The revolutions of 1989, and consequently the opening of the long isolated economies of the Central and Eastern European region, have shaken from the ground-up the ‘new democracies of Europe’. Centrally planned economies collapsed, and as a result systematic change abolished the central structures of wealth redistribution and regional equalization. At

the same time political liberalization and the penetration of democracy reignited the long suppressed movements of self-determination, resulting in the reemergence of regions and regional identities. In these circumstances there is no surprise that the notion of regions has become a frequent recurring topic of our social and scientific discussions. However near the bottom-up forces that still underpin the restructuring of the geographical space, we should also stress out the role of European integration and the necessity to comply with EU regional policy, which reinforced and accelerated the phenomenon of ‘making regions’ in transitional countries.

From these processes Romania doesn’t constitute an exception, where after 1989 the question of administrative-territorial reform has become a frequent, recurring topic of various political agendas. Unfortunately however reform initiatives for most of the time were addressed from the top–bottom, initiated by the central government, frequently around already decided outcomes. Considering the failure to incorporate bottom–up initiatives (the opinion of the wider public), added to this the ad-hoc approach, superficiality and inadequate preparation, it doesn’t come as a surprise that frequently reform initiatives ended up in failure. The superficiality of the political discourse was further exacerbated by the public debate, which instead of an in-depth, comprehensive analysis of the issue, was mainly catalyzed around superficial studies and models proposed by various stakeholders. This resulted in the emergence of a Form vs. Functionality paradox where the public was more preoccupied with the ‘borders’ and ‘capitals’ of the new units, than with the more important aspects of the process, like the implementation of the reform, the rights conferred to these units, the question of state decentralization, the establishment of a functional and effective multi-level territorial governance, etc.

This thesis was born out of the above mentioned deficiencies, from an urgent necessity to provide an in-depth, comprehensive analysis about the process of region-building and multi-level territorial governance in Romania, specifically focusing on possible scientific approaches, models for the establishment of an administrative-territorial meso-level in Romania. Although in the timeframe of the elaboration of this thesis (2012–2016) several studies appeared on the issue, yet it is our conviction that the hereby presented results can have a valuable contribution to the question of what kind of path Romania should chose to reform its administrative-territorial system.

I. Problem statement

1.1. New geographies of Europe

We live in an era of global challenges. Globalization, the overpopulation of the planet, world migrations, climate change, ‘the shrinking geographical space’, the ever deepening interrelations of the world confront today’s societies with such forces and provocations that are reshaping the very foundations of our social and spatial organization (Massey, 2006; Agnew and Duncan eds., 2011). Therefore it is not surprising that in the face of these new global forces and provocations the traditional role and structure of the nation-state is highly contested (Keating and Hughes, 2003). As noted by Loughlin, Hendriks and Lidström (2012) the emergence of these global challenges, as well as the appearance of a more and more borderless, ‘porous’ world has ‘relativized’ the traditional position of the nation-state by undermining its authority, with the slow transfer of national sovereignty over to supranational organizations. On the other side a subnational level is also emerging as a result of the aspiration for greater autonomy and self-determination of the constituent elements of the nation-state. This double oriented process of regionalism, supranational on the one side, subnational on the other shortly can be very well summarized by Wagstaff’s (1999, 4) words according to who the nation-state in the face of these new global forces ‘is both too big and too small’ to handle the challenges of the 21st century.

Therefore this is the broader picture, the redefined Europe into which the countries of Central and Eastern Europe are joining, being shaken from the bottom-up and top-bottom by the aforementioned processes. The great paradox of the history of Europe is that the appearance of mature, meso-level territorial structures, namely regions in their true sense are not connected to the emergence of centralized nation-states, but on the contrary it can be interpreted as a result of the diverse political fragmentation of the city-belt of Europe running from Northern Italy to the North Sea and the Baltic. This is due to the strong rivalry between free cities, independent principalities and kingdoms which didn’t leave any space for the emergence of strong centers, just to loose confederations (Hanseatic League, German-, Swiss- and Dutch confederations). Therefore the consolidations of strong centers initially began in the periphery of European core areas, namely in Portugal, Spain, England, Denmark, Sweden and France.

Central Europe with the early and successful consolidation of the Bohemian, Hungarian, Polish and Serbian core areas was in a similar position, however from the 16th century onwards the whole area for almost four hundred years fell into the imperialistic ambitions of several great powers, namely the Habsburg, Russian and Ottoman Empires, with

the late appearance, but growing interests of Prussia/Germany. In this respect it is not surprising that the concept of regions took a very different course of development on the eastern side of the continent, where instead of being an entity for communal self-determination and self-expression became an instrument of oppression and central control in the consolidation of multinational empires. Nonetheless under the national self-determination movements of the 19th century the collapsing empires didn't give birth to regions but to centralized nation-states, where regions if occurred were seen the very same way, namely as the means of central territorial control, as instruments of national consolidation. This is not at all surprising if we take into consideration that the emerging societies of the CEE region didn't have centuries to consolidate their position and to build up their state institutions (Caramani, 2003).

In the West however regions became embedded into the social and territorial fabric of the geographical space, becoming time- and space-specific institutionalized social constructions in the Paasian sense of the emergence of regions (Allen et al., 1998; Paasi, 2011). This distinctive path of development was largely due to the strong territorial fragmentation of the feudal age, to the long standing existence of local governments represented by counties, parishes, principalities, duchies, kingdoms and free cities reinforced by the development of commercial life and the appearance of democracy. In respect of Western Europe that is why I like to talk about the recent rebirth or the reappearance of regions, because in certain western societies the aforementioned historical processes despite the strong cohesive forces of nation-state formation had decisive roles in the appearance of strong subnational territorial entities, which being associated with their communities' self-identification, local governance and civic culture led to the institutionalization of their identities.

After 1945 the fall of the CEE region into the socialist sphere of influence represents the last, but the most decisive break from the western part of Europe, resulting in almost half a century of total political, cultural and economic isolation. Under the protective umbrella of the Soviet Union a highly centralized government is introduced, under which the fragile interwar structures of local governance are quickly replaced by one of central, national control according to 'the state's role to fulfill the local needs and requirements of the population'. Therefore the existing local energies and movements of self-determination were suppressed and the bottom-up oriented regionalism was soon replaced by a top-down oriented process of regionalization based on 'complex socio-economic principles', being interpreted as the only solution that 'directly supported the state's central organs in fulfilling state or party policies' (Novák, 2005; Covăsnianu, 2011; Săgeată, 2011).

1.2. In front of a redefined Romania

From the above outlined processes Romania doesn't constitute an exception, where the existence of a fragmented physical environment, a unique structure of socio-spatial interrelationships, added to this a diverging culturo-historical heritage at the crossroads of Western, Eastern and South Eastern Europe resulted in the emergence of a diversified geographical space from the local, to the regional and national level (Săgeată, 2006; Murgescu, 2010).

Romania can be regarded as a typical example of the Central and Eastern European region, where after the establishment of Greater Romania as will be presented later on national politics was dominated mainly by the consolidation processes of the newly acquired state territories. In this regard the regionalization of the state territory wasn't seen as the means of true decentralization of state powers in the name of subsidiarity and greater autonomy, but rather interpreted as one of state centralization and territorial control. Therefore centralism prevailed over regionalism, which is not surprising, especially given the short history of the Romanian nation-state, added to this the hardly achieved unity and independence (Nistor, 2000; Romsics, 2011; Bucur, 2012).

In this respect the establishment of the ministerial directories between 1929–1931, mainly along the historical regions of Romania wasn't anything else than a possibility to consolidate the main ruling, the National Peasants Party in the provinces, and to satisfy their elite to give some key positions to their clientele in the government (Săgeată, 2006; Covăsnianu, 2011; Bucur, 2012). The following attempts for territorial reform had the same approach. The short-lived '*ținuturi*' (approximate translation: lands) between 1938–1940 were nothing else than the mere consolidation of the dictatorship of King Carol II, while for the first time the politics of ethnical homogeneity in a multinational Romania were raised to the territorial level (Săgeată, 2006; Covăsnianu, 2011). With the establishment of the Socialist Republic of Romania, the state of the regime changed, but the approach to territory and the concept of regions remained the same. During the socialist era the territorial politics either imposed by Moscow or elaborated in Bucharest in principle had the same goals, namely the institutionalization of central governmental control over the state territory.

The revolution of 1989 and the transition into a democratic society with free market economy plunged Romania into almost a decade of social-economic chaos, marked by the very slow pace in the adoption of vital reforms. The question of the administrative-territorial system suffered a similar fate. Although the academic sphere pointed out quite early that the current county system cannot meet the needs of the 21st century market economy, yet reforms were

ignored, mainly due to the opposition of the very well consolidated Romanian political elite among the county system (Benedek, 2009). However on a declarative level the question of regions, regional politics and administrative-territorial reorganization has become a heated topic on the political agenda, especially catalyzed by the accession process to the European Union. Words like '*regions*', '*regional policy*', '*territorial planning*' and '*multi-level territorial governance*' have become frequent, recurring topics in the political campaigns of various parties, yet in reality almost very little has been made in this regard.

Unfortunately the public debate instead of an in-depth, comprehensive analysis of the question mainly catalyzed around the superficial studies and models proposed by various political stakeholders. This process mainly resulted in the frequent publication of several maps presenting the new administrative-territorial structure of Romania, very often generating heated, but superficial public debates. Therefore without understanding the true concept of regionalization, the public after a while was more preoccupied with the borders of the new administrative-territorial units, than with the more important aspects of the process, like the implementation model of the reform, the rights conferred to these new units, the question of state decentralization, the establishment of a functional and effective multi-level territorial governance, etc. Even the introduction of a regional policy in Romania and the establishment of the development regions can be regarded more as a necessity in drawing down EU funds, than a crucial step in the decentralization of the state.

II. Thesis outline and main objectives

Drawing from the above presented the main objective of this thesis would be to get an in-depth, comprehensive analysis about the process of regionalization and multilevel territorial governance in Romania, specifically focusing on possible scientific approaches, models for the establishment of an administrative-territorial meso-level in Romania. The actuality of the topic, confirms the necessity of the research, because although the question of administrative-territorial reform, as well as the decentralization of the state triggered a heated public debate in the last 4-5 years, yet in reality very few thorough analyses appeared on the issue.

Therefore along the above presented research theme we can conceptualize the following objectives and research questions:

MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THIS THESIS

O₁	Provide a theoretical introduction, terminological clarification in the chaos-driven public and political debate about the concept of regions.
O₂	Elaborate a comprehensive analysis about the appearance, evolution and institutionalization process of regions in Western, Central and Eastern Europe.
O₃	Draw up a comparative analysis about the process of region-building and multilevel territorial governance in the European Union, specifically focusing on the one hand on advanced, mature regional structures of Western Europe, and on the other side on constantly shifting spatial policies of Central and Eastern Europe.
O₄	Provide a comparative synthesis about several success stories and best practices of functional regional structures, which could stand as models in the process of administrative-territorial reform in Romania.
O₅	Elaborate a thorough analysis about the process of regionalization and multilevel territorial governance in Romania.
O₆	Provide an exploratory analysis about the academic, political and public debate on the proposed administrative-territorial reform appeared in the timeframe 2011–2013.
O₇	Taking into consideration the spatial characteristics of Romania, the opinion of the society, as well as the lessons learned from region building practices around the European Union, the main objective of this thesis is to present possible scientific approaches, models for the establishment of an administrative-territorial meso-level in Romania.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS OF THIS THESIS

Q₁	Did the appearance, evolution and institutionalization process of regions take a different course of development in Western, Central and Eastern Europe and if so what were the main factors leading to it?
Q₂	Could some countries from Western, Central and Eastern Europe constitute a positive example, model in the process of administrative-territorial reform in Romania?

Q3	From the establishment of the Romanian Unity until present day Romania were regions mainly interpreted as means of national consolidation and central control despite the existence of strong regional identities?
Q4	Can we talk about the existence of the meso-level, eg. regions in the spatial structure of Romania?
Q5	What are the main characteristics, expectations of the public, political debate regarding the possible administrative-territorial reorganization of Romania?

Therefore based on the above presented objectives and research questions, the proposed analysis would be elaborated along five thematic pillars organized around five chapters according to the following structure:

	THEMATIC PILLARS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH	STRUCTURE OF ANALYSIS	SCALE OF ANALYSIS
I	The notion of regions: a holistic approach	THEORETICAL	GLOBAL
II	The resurgence of regions		↓
III	Regions in Romania		REGIONAL
IV	In front of a redefined Romania: mapping public expectations, visions and discourses		↓
V	Between Form and Functionality: in front of a regionalized Romania	EMPIRICAL	LOCAL

The first part of the thesis will present a theoretical introduction to the concept of regions, specifically focusing on the processes leading to their appearance, evolution and institutionalization. Near its introductory, founding role, the analysis also has a more practical purpose, namely to bring a terminological clarification in the chaos-driven public and political debate about the concept regions and the processes of regionalism and regionalization.

The second pillar would provide an in-depth, comprehensive approach to the process of region-building and multilevel territorial governance throughout Europe, specifically focusing on the one hand on advanced, mature, regional structures of several western countries – specifically the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, Spain – and on the other side on countries from Central and Eastern Europe who already managed to implement a functional territorial policy, namely Poland. Therefore the analysis built along a space–time–society axis will address among others the processes leading to the emergence of regions, with special attention to the different experiences throughout Europe, the question of institutionalization, the appearance of the administrative meso-level, as well as the role of the European Union in diffusing the regional concept. The main objective of the second pillar would be to assess the process of region-building in Europe, to present success stories and best practices of functional

regional structures, which could stand as models in the process of administrative-territorial reform in Romania.

After a broader comparative approach, *the third pillar* will focus solely on Romania and through a historical, geographical approach will present the regional characteristics of Romania, the emergence of regional structures, as well as the evolution of the administrative-territorial system since the establishment of the modern Romanian state. At the same time the pillar would also provide an assessment about the dynamics and impact of territorial disparities, and the results of regional development policies.

The main objectives of the thesis will be elaborated through *the fourth and fifth pillars*, during which a thorough, exploratory analysis will be conducted about the question of administrative-territorial reform. Therefore the fourth pillar would present a summary of the characteristics of the academic, political and public debates on the proposed administrative-territorial reform emerged since 1989, with a special focus on recent regionalization discourses and projects appeared in the timeframe 2011–2013. For this a discourse analysis will be conducted on the appeared studies, public statements of various stakeholders of the society, as well as the appeared projects and proposals of the Romanian Government. We will also take the possibility to collect and analyze the various presentations and public statements appeared during the public consultation debates organized by the Romanian Government and several other actors of the academic and civil society (NGOs).

The fifth and last pillar of this thesis will address specifically the above presented Form vs. Functionality paradox of the public, political discourse with the main aim to shift the focus from borders and capitals to institutions and the overall quality of governance in Romania. In this regard we would like to highlight that we do not underestimate the role of a geographically optimal spatial structure, however we stand in line with a growing body of researchers and policy practitioners who emphasize the beneficial effect of a streamlined, efficient public administration, mature institutional structure and overall good governance not only on economic growth, but also on innovation, entrepreneurship, health, well-being, the reduction of poverty, as well as on the impact of Cohesion Policy. The first part of this chapter will present several possible scenarios, models for the administrative-territorial reorganization of Romania. Given however the complexity of the topic, the hereby elaborated analysis doesn't try to provide an ultimate model for regionalizing Romania. The aim of the second part of this chapter will be to shift the focus from geography to the administrative theme of regionalization. Specifically we will address the overall quality of governance in Romania and at the same time one of the key objectives of inquiry is to debate whether the establishment of

administrative-territorial regions in Romania could have a positive effect on the implementation of Cohesion Policy.

III. Methodology

Taking into consideration the complexity of the proposed research, its strong spatial and transnational aspect, the main scientific approach will be from an interdisciplinary, comparative framework. Therefore the central topic was approached through a set of quantitative and qualitative research methods built around the following structure:

I. Comprehensive conceptualization of the central topic → bibliographical documentation (literature analysis) about the process of region-building and multi-level territorial governance in the European Union and Romania. This was elaborated through the use of the research infrastructure offered by the Babeş-Bolyai University (libraries, scientific databases and research centers), the Regional Studies Association (through membership opportunities) and the Government of Romania (the ANELIS research database). Near this I took part in two major research internships, one at the Leibniz Institute for Regional Geography in Leipzig (Germany) between the 1st of June 2013 and the 13th of July 2013 and one at the Institute for Regional Studies – Centre for Economic and Regional Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences in Pécs (Hungary) between the 1st of May 2015 and the 29th of September 2015.

II. Gathering of Primary and Secondary Data Sources

- ❖ Gathering of quantitative data through existing statistical databases on European (EUROSTAT, ESPON) and national levels (statistical offices of the analyzed states) for further analysis.
- ❖ Collecting qualitative data through on-line and offline, newspapers, public statements, conference proceedings, scientific studies, NGO's (Academia Advocacy) and private research companies (IRES).

III. Analysis

'Histoire Croisée': taking into consideration the complexity of the proposed topic, its interdisciplinary aspect at the crossroads of space–time–society, presumed the elaboration of a unique, problem specific research methodology. Considering the comparative framework adopted by this thesis we also applied some of the theoretical foundations of the concept of *'Histoire Croisée'* (Werner and Zimmermann, 2006). The following aspects were of relevant importance to the thesis:

- ❖ Position of the Observer → producing a symmetrical equally distanced view of the object of analyze
- ❖ Scale of Comparison → the problem of selecting scales of analysis (national, subnational levels, etc.)
- ❖ Object of Comparison → the problem of selecting objects of analysis
- ❖ Complexity, Interaction, Multiperspectivity → elaborating a holistic, objective approach, detaching from the researchers own experiences, views.

Quantitative and qualitative research methods were used for statistical data processing, while for the graphic representation of spatial data we took use of the possibilities offered by *GIS and Digital Cartography*. Therefore from a methodological standpoint statistical data collection was be conducted according to the following structure:

- ❖ For the elaboration of questionnaires the method of computer-assisted web interviewing (CAWI) was applied, using free online questionnaire services like KwikSurveys and Google Docs.
- ❖ For discourse analyses, after the collection of vast amounts of data (audio, video or text) mainly from online newspapers, periodicals, public, scientific and government statements, the laborious work of data processing, like coding, linking and mapping was conducted with the possibilities offered by computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), mainly MAXQDA.
- ❖ For the creation of statistical databases and subsequent quantitative data analysis general productivity suites, like Microsoft Office and the more sophisticated IBM SPSS Statistics software package were used.
- ❖ For the creation of maps and other graphic products ESRI's ArcGIS package, as well as general vector and raster editors, like CorelDraw and Adobe Photoshop were used.

Conclusions

Throughout its history the Romanian state was frequently caught in an internal conflict on the one side by its mosaic-like territorial structure, heterogeneous population, upon which a multitude of regional identities have emerged, while on the other by the political realities of various times that often due to higher goals demanded the establishment of a centralized administrative structure. This latent internal conflict from time to time came to the forefront of the political and public debate, frequently materializing in reform proposals, even initiatives with the ultimate goal to incorporate meso-level territorial structures (i.e. regions) into the administrative-territorial structure of the country. In the last half a century however the World as we knew it has fundamentally changed. Growing social and economic disparities, the overpopulation of the planet, climate change, as well as the ever deepening interrelations of the World confronted today's societies with such forces and provocations that are reshaping the very foundations of our social and spatial organization. In these circumstances there is no surprise that near the underlying internal pressures, an external factor also significantly contributed to the emergence of a new regional discourse in Romania in the last two decades.

This thesis started from this broader perspective with **the main objective to get an in-depth comprehensive analysis about the process of regionalization and multilevel territorial governance in Romania with a special focus on possible scientific approaches, models for the establishment of an administrative-territorial meso-level in Romania.** The fundamental direction of inquiry was a holistic, interdisciplinary one and the main objective was unfolded along five thematic pillars organized around the initial 7 objectives and 5 research questions¹, all with the aim to analyze from different angles, different perspectives of the central topic.

	THEMATIC PILLARS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH	STRUCTURE OF ANALYSIS	SCALE OF ANALYSIS
I	The notion of regions: a holistic approach	THEORETICAL	GLOBAL
II	The resurgence of regions		↓
III	Regions in Romania		REGIONAL
IV	In front of a redefined Romania: mapping public expectations, visions and discourses		↓
V	Between Form and Functionality: in front of a regionalized Romania	EMPIRICAL	LOCAL

¹For the objectives and research questions see the Introduction chapter of this summary.

The goal of the *first pillar* was to provide a **theoretical introduction, a terminological clarification to the concept of regions**, being especially important in the context of the terminological chaos-driven public and political debate. The notion of the region as was presented in this thesis is used in a wide variety of places, having sometimes very contradictory meanings. Geographers being one of the primordial users of the notion mainly use it to delimit, or better to say define areas of the broader geographical space – whether we talk about physical or cultural characteristics as the starting point for such a classification –, while sociologist and anthropologists put emphasis on the socio-cultural characteristic that binds societies together. Contrary to this economists are more interested in the effect of space, specifically that of geographical distance on economic processes, while administrative scientists focus on the organization of state administration in a certain area at different geographic scales. Near this the notion itself is used in a wide variety of circumstances. Multinational corporations organize their activity according to different markets, i.e. regions they serve. At the same time it is common nowadays that companies customize their products to meet the specificities of select markets. Therefore it is understandable why we cannot give an ultimate definition for the notion of region. In essence different perspectives lead to a wide variety of ‘regions’, however this doesn’t mean that one conclusion is wrong, while the other one is correct. In this context a perfect model, an ultimate solution for the reorganization of Romania doesn’t exist and this should be one of the guiding principles of any reform proposal whether originates from the bottom–up, from the expectations of local communities or from the top–bottom, from the centre.

Through the *second pillar* a **comparative analysis about the process of region-building and multilevel territorial governance in the European Union** was elaborated with a **special focus on several success stories and best practices of functional regional structures**, which **could stand as models** in the process of administrative-territorial reform in Romania. Giving an overview of territorial reforms of mature western European democracies was pivotal for the objectives of our inquiry, since region building processes emerging in post-1989 Romania, and more broadly in the Central and Eastern European region were largely influenced by western European countries. After all the new democracies of Europe were in front of a major overhaul of their socio-economic systems, eager to join to the European family of nations. In this transition process however there was a strong power asymmetry between the EU and acceding countries. As a result through the process of ‘Europeanization’ and ‘good governance’ new socio-economic systems, and overall a ‘European standard’ was promoted, and due to the above mentioned power asymmetry in the majority of the cases adopted by

candidate countries. Although in this thesis we've presented several case studies, country portraits that due to structural, historical, political or even economic reasons could constitute a viable, functional model for the eventual establishment of the administrative-territorial meso-level in Romania, yet it is our conviction that there is no recipe for decentralization, a readily adaptable model. In fact every country has distinctive characteristics that evolved through hundreds or even thousands of years embedded into the fabric of the geographical space. In this perspective every country has its own geography, which requires a unique model for spatial organization. That is true however that we can learn from and implement some European experiences.

The main objective of the *third pillar* was to present a **thorough analysis about the process of regionalization and multilevel territorial governance in Romania from the establishment of the first seeds of administrative-territorial organization of the Romanian nation state until present day Romania.** The fundamental direction of inquiry was a holistic, historico-geographic one, chosen not by mistake, because recent discourses towards region building in Romania largely neglected the heritage of the past, as well as previous, in some cases functional models of state organization. As a result of this analysis we can conclude, that considering its function, as well as its relationship towards the ruling elite the meso-level in Romania went through a development in three distinct phases.

- I. The phase of *national consolidation* is characteristic to the era of Romanian nation-building present from the establishment of the first Romanian nation state, throughout the interwar period, until the fall of the country into the soviet sphere of influence. In this period although it is recognized that local, bottom-up oriented initiatives, as well as the establishment of local autonomy and the principles of decentralization are indispensable for the harmonious development of the state. Yet the widespread view among the ruling elite that freeing up local energies could put an end to the hardly achieved unity prevented any serious approach towards the establishment of a regional level. This approach was especially reinforced after the First World War, when gaining significant amount of territory and population Romania has become a much more heterogeneous country with significant socio-economic disparities and a diversity of minorities. Regions even if existed were interpreted more like agents subordinated to the centre in the name of national consolidation and territorial control.

- II. With the appearance of the communist regime also appeared a new ruling elite that had to consolidate its power in the provinces. Therefore the phase of national consolidation was substituted by one of *power consolidation*, where regions were interpreted as the framework to consolidate the power of the new ruling elite in the provinces. Any connection to the interwar county structure was rejected, borders were redrawn and toponyms were changed. As a result soviet-type pseudo-regions were established mainly with the role to directly support the fulfilment of state and party policies on the local level.
- III. After the revolution of 1989, the socio-economic transition have shaken from the ground-up the spatial structure of Romania. The centrally planned economy collapsed, and as a result systematic change abolished the central structures of wealth redistribution and regional equalization. Among this chaos became obvious that the current administrative system cannot face the challenges of the 21st century, especially if we consider that the current county structure is a heritage of a very different past, originating in 1968. Therefore with EU accession ahead, the necessity to establish an EU conform regional policy, as well as to adopt the *acquis communautaire* a new phase began to emerge. *This came as a result of EU conditionality, but also as an internal recognition of the necessity to modernize the state administration.*

Through the fourth pillar an exploratory analysis was carried out about the main expectations of the Romanian society regarding a possible administrative-territorial reform. In order to grasp the pulse of the society through the use of a mix of indirect qualitative and quantitative tools we analyzed a large dataset of two major nationwide public consultations, several public surveys, and conducted our own survey on the topic. In general we can conclude that superficiality and polarization characterizes the most the public discourse. Even if on the surface there is a wide support for the administrative-territorial reorganization of the state, due to the superficial approach of the government, ad-hoc decision making and a lack of a proposal, the public discourse is mainly represented by division and ambiguity on the effective content and approach to such an undertaking. Considering the main arguments brought in *favour* and *against* the regionalization of Romania we can conclude that the main themes that occupy the society were mainly connected to the overall state of the economy, to the deficiencies coming from an overcentralized, highly bureaucratic administration, which is regarded as largely responsible for the mismanagement of national and EU funds. Given the wide public support for reform, it doesn't come as a surprise that for the most part the public debate was mainly

dominated by the positive arguments, advantages brought in favour of the process. Overall regionalization is viewed as a process that in its consequences would go far beyond than the redrawing of the administrative map, bringing a positive influence on the socio-economic development, as well as the overall functioning of the state itself. The common view is that regionalization would bring decisions closer to the ordinary citizen, result in decentralization, the reduction of bureaucracy, contribute to a more efficient public administration and would be a framework for the reduction of disparities. On the other side however regionalization is also viewed as a disadvantage, as a process that would result in growing disparities, territorial fragmentation, the further strengthening of core-periphery relations and the overall marginalization of the countryside.

Although initially the main objective of the *fifth pillar* was to elaborate a multi-dimensional model, possible scenario for the administrative-territorial reorganization of Romania. Yet given the multitude of proposals and models that appeared in the timeframe of the elaboration of this thesis became obvious from early on that due to the nature and complexity of the problem we cannot provide an ultimate solution, a readily adaptable model. In this perspective the fifth pillar instead of enlisting geographically optimal models for the regionalization of Romania, **mainly presented possible scientific approaches for the administrative-territorial reorganization of the state.** The rationale behind this approach was that there is no ultimate definition for the notion of regions, different approaches, the selection of different criteria leads to a variety of regional constructions. Therefore a perfect model doesn't exist, in essence the long term success of any proposal will be in the hands of political decision makers. In this regard we would like to highlight again that we do not underestimate the role of a geographically optimal spatial structure, however we stand in line with a growing body of researchers and policy practitioners who emphasize the beneficial effect of a streamlined, efficient public administration, mature institutional structure and overall good governance not only on economic growth, but also on innovation, entrepreneurship, health, well-being, the reduction of poverty, as well as on the impact of Cohesion Policy. At the same time European experience has demonstrated very well that contrary to the official discourse in Romania, the regionalization of the state does not necessarily result in a more successful EU Cohesion Policy implementation, that is to say in higher absorption rate. For example Italy and Spain are regionalized states, yet are in the same group with the majority of the countries from Central and Eastern Europe, the best performing countries being the ones that have a much more streamlined, decentralized administrative system and an overall high quality of governance. Considering Romania, the existence of a highly centralized and bureaucratic

administrative system with poor administrative capacity, added to this the issue of corruption, as well as the lack of appropriately qualified human resources can be regarded as the main bottlenecks in the implementation of EU Cohesion Policy.

Considering the above presented results we can conclude that in Romania regions do indeed exist and there is significant momentum, real support among the society for broader decentralization, for 'bringing decisions closer to the ordinary citizen'. In this regard however we should stress out that although there were historical precedents when the regional level began to establish itself, yet in reality mainly due to the above outlined circumstances the organization of state administration in Romania evolved around the Napoleonic tradition represented by strong centralism. In these circumstances regions if existed, they had very limited room for autonomy and were largely subordinated to central authorities. This path of development of the meso-level cannot be omitted from nowadays political and academic discourses, because this historical heritage influences even nowadays the characteristics of organizing the state administration. As for future considerations it is obvious that the notion of regions will come back to the political discourse and in this respect the most interesting question is how will evolve the spatial characteristics of Romania, and what kind of regionalization processes the society will choose. Given the strong centralist tradition of Romania, as well as due to existing EU obligations it is very highly probable that any future consideration towards the reorganization of the state will tilt towards preserving the existing situation (status-quo), because this is the one that presents the lowest costs and conflict risks.

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